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The Contribution of Thomas Carlyle to British Idealism, c. 1880 – 1930

That Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) exercised an enormous influence over the British Idealism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has often been noted. Through works such as *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4), *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841), *Past and Present* (1843) and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), it has been pointed out, Carlyle transmitted his beliefs regarding the immanence of the divine in nature and man, the inadequacy of utilitarianism and *laissez-faire* and the ethical role of the state to a generation of subsequent philosophers. However, while scholars have certainly acknowledged Carlyle's influence on British Idealism, they have done so passingly, superficially, and on the basis of only a tiny fraction of the relevant source material.¹

¹ Some recent representative statements are W. J. Mander, 'Introduction', in W. J. Mander (ed.), *Anglo-American Idealism, 1865-1927* (Westport, CN, 2000), 1-19, at 2-3; David Boucher, 'Introduction', in

In contrast, the current article will provide a close, comprehensive and even exhaustive analysis of the British Idealists' debts to Carlyle. In terms of temporal scope, the article will focus primarily on sources published between 1880 and 1930. No doubt, long before 1880, contemporaries were already referring to Carlyle as 'first and foremost among the idealistic writers of our age', and the leader of a nascent school of 'English Idealism'.² Moreover, during the later years of his life, Carlyle also served as an enthusiastic patron to James Hutchison Stirling, the author of *The Secret of Hegel* (1865), a book widely recognised as a watershed in the history of British Idealism.³

David Boucher (ed.), *The Scottish Idealists* (Exeter, 2004), 1-22, at 2-3; John Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle* (London, 2006), 217-18; Cairns Craig, 'Nineteenth-Century Scottish Thought', in Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock (eds.), *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 2006), ii, 267-76; W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford, 2011), 25-7; David Fergusson, 'Scottish Idealism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, vol. I, 'Philosophy and Natural Sciences' (Cambridge, 2013), 272-98, at 276-7; David Boucher, 'The Scottish Contribution to British Idealism and the Reception of Hegel', in Gordon Graham (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford, 2015), 154-82, at 158-9. In what follows, my aim is not to dispute the claims of these scholars, but rather to develop and substantiate them. For this reason (and for reasons of space), I will make relatively little reference to the secondary literature, preferring instead a sustained and extensive engagement with the primary sources.

² J. D. Morell, *A Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols (London, 1846), ii, 201, 207, see also 483-5; H. Taine, *L'Idéalisme anglais: Etude sur Carlyle* (Paris, 1864), 3, 127. Cf. [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'A French View of Mr Carlyle', *Saturday Review*, 17 (1864), 690-91, at 690.

³ J. H. Stirling (1820-1909), Scottish-born physician and independent scholar. When Stirling applied for the Chairs of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1866 and 1868 respectively, Carlyle provided testimonials, describing Stirling as the 'one man in Britain capable of bringing metaphysical philosophy, in the ultimate, German or European, and highest actual form of it, distinctly home to the understanding of British men'. See Amelia Hutchison Stirling, *James Hutchison Stirling: His Life and Work* (London, 1912), 49-59, 94-6, 111-13, 172-6, 184, 200-202, quotation from 1868 testimonial at 206-7. See also TC to Emerson, 28 Sep 1870, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. J. Slater (New York, 1964), 573. On Stirling's book as a watershed in the history of British Idealism, see

However, the half-century between 1880 and 1930 was the peak period of British Idealism, and this is when the largest number and most significant references to Carlyle occurred.

In terms of geographical scope, the current article will concentrate primarily on British Idealism as practised within Britain itself. In particular, it will focus heavily upon the so-called ‘Scottish Idealists’, many of whom were trained by Edward Caird during his tenure of the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow (1866–93), before being dispatched to universities throughout Britain.⁴ However, the article will also

Mander, *British Idealism*, 9.

⁴ On ‘Scottish Idealism’, see note 1 above. Edward Caird (1835-1908) was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow 1866-93, then Master of Balliol College, Oxford 1893-1907. The pupils of Caird at Glasgow taken into account are: Henry Jones (1852-1922), lecturer at Aberystwyth, Bangor and St. Andrews 1882-94, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow 1894-1922; John Stuart Mackenzie (1860-1935), Fellow at Edinburgh 1884-9, Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge 1890-96, Professor of Logic and Philosophy at University College, Cardiff 1895-1915; John Henry Muirhead (1855-1940), Snell Exhibitioner at Balliol 1875-9, lecturer at Glasgow and Royal Holloway College, Professor of Philosophy and Public Economy at University of Birmingham 1896-1921; John MacCunn (1846-1929), Snell Exhibitioner at Balliol 1872-9, Professor of Philosophy at University College, Liverpool 1881-1911. Also taken into account is Hector Hetherington (1888-1965), a pupil of Caird’s successor at Glasgow, Henry Jones, lecturer in philosophy at Glasgow 1910-14, Professor of Logic and Philosophy at University College, Cardiff 1915-20, Professor of Philosophy at University College, Exeter 1920-24, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, 1924-7, Vice-Chancellor at Liverpool 1927-36, Principal and Vice-Chancellor at Glasgow 1936-61. However, several alumni of Edinburgh will also be taken into account, namely: David George Ritchie (1853-1903), classical exhibitioner, fellow and tutor at Balliol College and Jesus College, Oxford 1875-94, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at St. Andrews 1894-1903; Andrew Seth (Pringle-Pattison) (1856-1931), Professor of Logic and Philosophy at University College, Cardiff 1883-7, Professor of Logic, Rhetoric and Metaphysics at St Andrews 1887–91, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Edinburgh 1891-1919; James Seth (1860-1925), Professor of Metaphysics at Dalhousie College, Canada 1886-92, Professor at Brown University, USA 1892-6, Professor at Cornell University, USA, 1896-8, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh 1898-1925; William Ritchie Sorley (1855-1935), Professor at University College, Cardiff 1888-94, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Aberdeen 1894-1900,

demonstrate that indigenous English Idealists, based for the most part at Balliol College, Oxford (to which Caird himself moved in 1893), owed similar debts to Carlyle.⁵ Moreover, as one of Caird's students pointed out, the master's 'intellectual children' also guarded 'the outposts of the Empire', and some attention will be given to those British Idealists employed at universities in Canada, Australia and South Africa (and, in one exceptional case, the USA).⁶ In this way, the writings of a total of twenty-eight British Idealist philosophers will be taken into account.

Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge 1900-33; James Black Baillie (1872-1940), Professor of Moral Philosophy at Aberdeen 1902-24, Vice-Chancellor at Leeds 1924-38. Another Edinburgh alumnus taken into account is Richard Burdon Haldane (1856-1928), Liberal MP 1885-1911, Secretary of State for War 1905-12, Lord Chancellor 1912-15 and 1924.

⁵ The Balliol men taken into account are: Richard Lewis Nettleship (1846-92), Fellow and Tutor at Balliol 1869-92; Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), lecturer at University College, Oxford 1871-81, employee of London Ethical Society and Charity Organisation Society 1881-97, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews 1903-8; Andrew Cecil Bradley (1851-1935), Fellow at Balliol 1874-81, Professor of Literature and History at University College, Liverpool 1882-9, Regius Professor at Glasgow 1889-1901, Professor of Poetry at Oxford 1901-6; John Alexander Smith (1863-1939), Jowett Lecturer of Philosophy at Balliol 1896-1910, Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy 1910-36. Beyond Balliol, other Oxford scholars taken into account are: Henry Nettleship (1839-93), Corpus Professor of Latin 1878-93; Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924), Fellow at Merton College 1870-1924; Clement Charles Julius Webb (1865-1954), Fellow and Tutor at Magdalen College 1889-1922, Oriel Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion 1920-30. As noted in note 4 above, Muirhead, MacCunn and Ritchie all spent time at Balliol.

⁶ R. M. Wenley, 'Edward Caird', *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1909), 115-38, at 122. Pupils of Caird at Glasgow taken into account are: John Watson (1847-1939), Professor of Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada 1872-89, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the same 1889-1924; James Cappon (1854-1939), lecturer at Glasgow, Professor of English Language and Literature at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada 1888-1919; Robert Mark Wenley (1861-1929), lecturer at Glasgow 1886-96, Professor of Philosophy at University of Michigan, USA 1896-1929. Other alumni of Glasgow taken into account are John Clark Murray (1836-1917), a classmate of Caird at Glasgow, who became Professor of Moral and Mental Philosophy at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada 1862-72, and Professor of Logic at McGill University, Montreal, Canada 1872-1903, and Hugh Adam Reyburn (1886-1950), a pupil of Henry

What is immediately apparent is that many of these thinkers made extremely strong statements regarding the enormous importance of Carlyle, and particularly his role in preparing the ground for the reception of German Idealism in Britain. As early as 1850, J. H. Stirling wrote of how Carlyle had transformed ‘the whole field of intellectual vision’, later recalling that he had been ‘every literary young man’s idol, almost the god he prayed to’.⁷ In 1868 R. L. Nettleship expressed his belief that Carlyle ‘ought to be published in volumes “for the waistcoat pocket,” that one might drink of him whenever one felt faint’, while in 1887 Bernard Bosanquet opined that ‘Carlyle’s work has had an influence on English life that cannot be calculated’, ‘the whole movement of our time’ having ‘received a large part of its stimulus from him’.⁸ For his part, Edward Caird recalled in 1892 that during his youth, ‘Carlyle was the author who

Jones at Glasgow, who became Professor of Logic and Psychology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa 1912-50. Also taken into account are two alumni of Edinburgh, namely Henry Laurie (1837-1922), Lecturer in Logic at the University of Melbourne, Australia 1882-6, Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at the same 1886-1911, and James Seth, who taught at Dalhousie College in Canada from 1886 to 1892 (see note 4 above). Also taken into account is one alumnus of Balliol, namely Arthur Ritchie Lord (1880-1941), lecturer in political science at Aberdeen 1902-5, Professor of Philosophy and History at Rhodes University College, Grahamstown, South Africa 1905-40, and one alumnus of Cambridge, namely William Jethro Brown (1868-1930), Professor of Law and Modern History at the University of Tasmania, Australia 1893-1900, Professor of Constitutional Law at University College London 1901-2, Professor of Comparative Law at University College Wales, Aberystwyth 1902-6, Professor of Law at the University of Adelaide, Australia 1906-16.

⁷ [J. H. Stirling], ‘Letters on Carlyle’, *The Truth-Seeker or Present Age* (London, 1850), 94-101, 148-63, 245-9, at 97; James Hutchison Stirling, *Thomas Carlyle’s Counsels to a Literary Aspirant* (Edinburgh, 1886), 27.

⁸ R. L. Nettleship to H. S. Holland, 4 Sep. 1868, in *Henry Scott Holland: Memoirs and Letters*, ed. Stephen Paget (London, 1921), 28; Bernard Bosanquet, letter dated 24 Dec. 1887, in Helen Bosanquet, *Bernard Bosanquet: A Short Account of His Life* (London, 1924), 41. See also Bernard Bosanquet, ‘The Philosophical Importance of a True Theory of Identity,’ *Mind*, 13 (1888), 356-69, at 369.

exercised the most powerful charm upon young men who were beginning to think', having been the first to discover not only 'the full significance of the great revival of German literature', but also what it 'meant *for us*'.⁹ In 1908 J. S. Mackenzie also identified Carlyle as a crucial figure in the introduction of German Idealism into Britain, while in 1909 Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison recalled the enormous influence of Carlyle during his own undergraduate days, describing him as 'the greatest living Scotsman and one of the chief intellectual and moral forces of the century'.¹⁰ Over subsequent years, Henry Jones, R. M. Wenley, C. C. J. Webb, J. S. Mackenzie and James Cappon all acknowledged Carlyle as a key figure in the dissemination of German Idealism in Britain, while in 1920 W. R. Sorley praised Carlyle for having 'forced upon public attention ideas concerning the ultimate meaning and value of life'.¹¹ In 1922 Henry Jones described Carlyle 'one of the greatest spiritual forces in this country in the nineteenth century',¹² while in 1929 A. C. Bradley recalled that the writings of Carlyle

⁹ Edward Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', in idem., *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1892), i, 230-67, at 233.

¹⁰ J. S. Mackenzie, 'La philosophie contemporaine en Grande-Bretagne', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 16 (1908), 583-606, at 583-6, 600; A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, 'Introduction', *Selected Essays of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1909), vii-xix, at viii.

¹¹ Henry Jones, *The Working Faith of the Social Reformer and Other Essays* (London, 1910), 197-8; R. M. Wenley, *Kant and his Philosophical Revolution* (New York, 1910), 271; Clement C. J. Webb, *A History of Philosophy* (New York and London, 1915), 236-7; J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Ethical Theory of Hegel: A Study of the Philosophy of Right. By Hugh A. Reyburn', *Mind*, new series, 31 (1922), 356-8, at 357; James Cappon, 'A School of Idealism: Meditatio Laici', in *Philosophical Essays Presented to John Watson* (Kingston, Ontario, 1922), 1-36, at 1, 19; William Ritchie Sorley, *A History of English Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1920), 239-40.

¹² Henry Jones, *A Faith that Enquires: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Glasgow in the Years 1920 and 1921* (London, 1922), 7. As Jones recalled, he had first discovered Carlyle while a student in Wales: 'It was a case of love at first sight, and my young admiration has but deepened with the years'. See Henry Jones, *Old Memories*, ed. T. Jones (London, 1922), 95, also 68.

had ‘permeated’ the ‘minds of several generations’.¹³ Even as late as 1931 J. H. Muirhead wrote of how Carlyle had ‘exercised an influence in England and America that no other did upon the course of philosophical thought of his time’.¹⁴

To be sure, such glowing praise was at times qualified. Indeed, the British Idealists often acknowledged that Carlyle’s knowledge of German Idealism had been incomplete, particularly in his ignorance of Hegel, and that his writings had lacked philosophical rigor and systematicity. For this reason, they stressed the need for a detailed study of German Idealism, and particularly of Hegel, and presented their own endeavours as an attempt to complete the work that Carlyle had begun. For instance, in *The Secret of Hegel* (1865), J. H. Stirling acknowledged Carlyle’s leading role in the ‘Germanico-Literary Re-action’ against ‘the Aufklärung’, while claiming that this had been ‘incomplete’ and ‘subjective’, a defect that could be remedied through recourse to Hegel.¹⁵ Similarly, in 1891 Henry Jones wrote of how Carlyle had only ‘brought us within sight of our future, and we are now taking a step into it’, while in 1901 R. M. Wenley lamented that Carlyle ‘had neither stayed to probe the roots of idealism in Kant, nor proceeded to think through the constructive expression in Hegel’.¹⁶ Three years later

¹³ A. C. Bradley, *A Miscellany* (London, 1929), 7-8.

¹⁴ John H. Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, in idem., *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy* (London, 1931), pp. 123-46, at 127. See also John Henry Muirhead, *Reflections by a Journeyman in Philosophy* (London, 1942), 32.

¹⁵ James Hutchison Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Order, Principle, Form, and Matter*, 2 vols (London, 1865), i, lxxiii-lxxiv. Following a visit to Carlyle’s home in 1857, Stirling had noted: ‘Kant, Spinoza, Hegel – knows little of those’. See Stirling, *James Hutchison Stirling*, 140-41, and also James Hutchison Stirling, *What is Thought? or the Problem of Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1900), 212.

¹⁶ Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow, 1891), 72; R. M. Wenley, ‘Some Lights on the British Idealistic Movement in the Nineteenth Century’, *American Journal of Theology*, 5 (1901), 445-72, at 457.

in 1904 a comparable point was made by R. B. Haldane, who remarked, with reference to Carlyle, that while ‘Art and Religion can do much’, ‘it is only the iron logic of philosophy’ that can reveal ‘the full truth’.¹⁷ For his part, J. H. Muirhead admitted in 1912 that Carlyle had frequently expressed ‘contempt’ for ‘the systematizing spirit’, preferring to rely instead on ‘intuition’.¹⁸ Similarly, in their biography of Edward Caird, published in 1921, Jones and Muirhead wrote of how

Carlyle had startled the minds of men rather than convinced them. He had flung explosives and flashlights into the darkness around, but there was no steady vision nor quiet possession of the new country... Carlyle employed the conceptions which were to rule the new era *against* the existing ways of life and forms of belief rather than evolved their significance constructively.

According to Jones and Muirhead, ‘after the denunciatory prophet, there was [thus] room and need for the placid teacher and the steadying strength of demonstrated truth’, a role that had effectively been performed by Caird.¹⁹

¹⁷ R. B. Haldane, *The Pathway to Reality: Stage the Second. Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St Andrews in the Session 1903 – 1904* (London, 1904), 104-5.

¹⁸ J. H. Muirhead, ‘Ethics’, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 12 vols (Edinburgh, 1908–27), vol. 5 (1912), 414-25, at 416.

¹⁹ Henry Jones and John Henry Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow, 1921), 59-60. See also J. S. Mackenzie, ‘Conflicts in Valuations’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, new series, 31 (1930-31), 161-82, at 171, John Alexander Smith, ‘The Influence of Hegel on the Philosophy of Great Britain’, in B. Wigersma (ed.), *Verhandlungen des ersten Hegelkongresses von 22. bis 25. April 1930 in Haag* (Tübingen, 1931), 57-66, 59, and J. H. Muirhead, ‘F. H. Bradley’, in *Idealismus: Jahrbuch für die idealistische Philosophie*, 1 (1934), 199-204, at 199.

Nonetheless, as the current article will demonstrate, the British Idealists were enormously influenced by Carlyle in almost every aspect of their thought, including their theology, their moral and ethical philosophy and their social and political thought. Together, an analysis of these debts will contribute to our understanding of the transition that occurred within British philosophy from the late-eighteenth to the early-twentieth centuries, very largely under the impetus of a specifically Scottish tradition of thought. Indeed, as Ralph Jessop has forcefully argued, the opposition of earlier Scottish thinkers such as Thomas Reid (1710–96) and William Hamilton (1788–1856) to the scepticism, materialism and sensationalism of David Hume (1711–76) was given powerful continuance in the works of Carlyle, being further reinforced through reference to contemporary German Idealism.²⁰ As this article will make clear, Carlyle then in turn bequeathed this tradition to a band of subsequent Idealist philosophers, a very large proportion of whom were also Scots, who had received their early education within the Scottish university system, and who were similarly drawn to German Idealism. Thus, Carlyle emerges as far-and-away the most prominent figure in a tradition of Scottish philosophy that stretched across a period of three centuries, and which culminated in British Idealism, the hegemonic philosophical school in Britain for several decades. In this sense, as Edward Caird put it in 1883, Carlyle, like Hegel, was one of the crucial figures in the ‘great movement of thought which characterizes the nineteenth century’, namely ‘a movement through negation to reaffirmation, through destruction to reconstruction’.²¹ Furthermore, in political terms, such an excavation will

²⁰ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (Basingstoke, 1997).

²¹ Edward Caird, *Hegel* [1883], American ed. (Philadelphia, PA, 1896), 2-3. See also James Cappon, *Edward Caird, a Reminiscence* (Kingston, Ontario, 1909), 279, where Cappon remarks: ‘he who cannot think in the forms of Hegel and Carlyle does not really participate in modern thought’.

serve to recover the immense legacy that Carlyle left between his death in 1881 and the 1930s, after which his reputation was engulfed by accusations of ‘fascism’, having never recovered even to the present day.²² Indeed, as the sources surveyed below reveal, Carlyle’s influence during these earlier decades was in fact broadly progressive, consisting in socialistic proposals for economic reform, as well as projects for the education of the working classes for participation and citizenship within a representative democracy. Finally, a study of the British Idealists’ response to Carlyle will validate the conclusions of some recent research on Carlyle himself, while at the same time providing a stimulus to future inquiry.²³

Religion and Metaphysics

With regard to theology, the British Idealists strongly endorsed Carlyle’s polemic against the mechanistic Deism of the eighteenth century, and particularly its conception of a transcendent God, who had designed the world in the manner of a machine, and then withdrew, sat back, and watched it run, and whose existence was to be demonstrated through ‘evidences’ of ‘design’. For instance, as Henry Jones wrote in 1891, Carlyle had, ‘more than any other English writer’, testified to the ‘despair’ that

²² For a succinct and representative statement of such charges, see J. Salwyn Schapiro, ‘Thomas Carlyle: Prophet of Fascism’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 17 (1945), 97-115. For an overview and refutation of such accusations, see David R. Sorensen, “‘The Great Pioneer of National Socialist Philosophy’”? Carlyle and Twentieth-Century Totalitarianism’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45 (2012), 43-66.

²³ The author wishes to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for having pushed him to the broader historiographical claims that are made in this paragraph.

naturally ‘followed’ from ‘the Deism of the eighteenth century’.²⁴ Similarly, in 1897 Andrew Seth remarked that ‘Carlyle’s running polemic against what he calls “the mechanical system of thought,” and the grim irony with which he assails the notion of “*proof* of a God,” – “a *probable* God,” – furnish some of his strongest passages’.²⁵ In 1901 R. M. Wenley noted that ‘when Carlyle began to exercise vital sway over the youth’, Britain was still dominated by the ‘natural theology’ of ‘Locke’, ‘Paley’ and the ‘authors of the Bridgewater Treatises’. ‘Summarily stated’, Wenley explained, ‘this popular theory separate[d] God from the world and conceive[d] of him as interfering with the natural order in the same ways as an artificer might use his materials’. Such doctrines, Wenley claimed, had ‘remained unchallenged to all intents and purposes till Carlyle’s appearance’.²⁶ Several years later, in 1909, Henry Jones once again sharply rejected such ‘harsh contrasts’ and ‘intolerable antagonisms’ between ‘spirit’ and ‘nature’, citing in his support Carlyle’s caricature of natural theology as the belief that ‘Nature’ was ‘dead, an old eight-day clock made many thousands of years ago and still ticking on, but as dead as brass, which the Maker at most sat looking at, in a distant, singular, and now plainly indeed, incredible manner’.²⁷ Similarly, around the same time,

²⁴ Jones, *Browning*, 50-51.

²⁵ Andrew Seth, *Two Lectures on Theism* (New York, 1897), 14-15.

²⁶ Wenley, ‘Some Lights on the British Idealistic Movement’, 451-3, 466-7. See also R. M. Wenley, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since’, *University of California Publications in Philosophy*, 6 (1929), 265-85, at 277-8.

²⁷ Henry Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed: Being the Lectures on Philosophy and Modern Life Delivered Before the University of Sydney* (Glasgow, 1909), 26-8. See also Henry Jones, ‘Modern Scientific and Philosophic Thought Regarding Human Society’, in J. B. Paton, P. W. Bunting and A. E. Garvie (eds.), *Christ and Civilization: A Survey of the Influence of the Christian Religion upon the Course of Civilization* (London, 1910), 491-521, at 509-10.

John MacCunn also invoked Carlyle's 'protest against the 'Absentee God' who sits on the outskirts of His universe to watch it go'.²⁸

According to the British Idealists, Carlyle had also been correct in his claim that by removing God from the world, this false theology had inevitably given rise to the materialism and scepticism of David Hume and the French Encyclopaedists.²⁹ As Edward Caird put it in his essay 'The Genius of Carlyle' (1892), by conceiving 'Nature' as 'a piece of dead mechanism', the deists of the eighteenth century had rendered 'Religion' a 'hypocrisy', and this had 'therefore called forth an atheistic philosophy to destroy it'.³⁰ Similarly, in 1897, having cited Carlyle's strictures against mechanistic theology, Andrew Seth claimed that the latter had contributed to 'the drift of empirical philosophy towards a materialistic atheism', such as that of Diderot and Holbach.³¹ Somewhat later, in 1927, J. H. Muirhead argued that natural theology's 'separation' of 'the ideal from the real', 'the finite from the infinite', had been brought to its logical conclusion in 'Hume's philosophy'. 'Carlyle', Muirhead added, 'had felt all this – no one more vividly'.³² For his part, R. M. Wenley argued in 1929 that by excluding 'providential interference from celestial mechanics', 'Newton' and 'Locke' had effectively rendered 'the hypothesis of God superfluous', and that it had fallen to 'Hume to render the implicit contradiction explicit, by drawing unavoidable conclusions from the premises laid down by his predecessors'. 'Carlyle', Wenley noted, had been 'compelled to

²⁸ John MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers: Bentham, J. S. Mill, Cobden, Carlyle, Mazzini, T. H. Green* (London, 1910), 171.

²⁹ On British Idealism as a response to the so-called 'Victorian crisis of faith', see Mander, *British Idealism*, ch. 5.

³⁰ Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', 253-4.

³¹ Seth, *Two Lectures on Theism*, 5-10.

³² J. H. Muirhead, 'How Hegel Came to England', *Mind*, new series, 36 (1927), 423-47, at 435.

painful heart-searchings by the rationalism of Hume', and had thus been driven to seek a new foundation for religious faith.³³

As the British Idealists made clear, Carlyle had discovered such a foundation in German Idealism, and in particular its belief that God was not a transcendent artificer standing apart from the world, but rather a divine principle *immanent* in nature. This belief, they explained, had effectively subsumed materialism within what Carlyle had called a 'Natural Supernaturalism' (*Sartor Resartus*). For instance, in 1890 J. H. Stirling argued that Carlyle's passages on 'Natural Supernaturalism' had been 'the very first English words towards the restoration and rehabilitation of the *dethroned upper powers*', an attempt to re-establish 'in every earnest, educated, but doubting soul' the 'vital reality of true religion'.³⁴ For Henry Jones, writing in 1891, Carlyle had thus overcome the dualisms of Deism, recognizing the rights of both 'nature' and 'spirit'.³⁵ The following year, in 1892, Edward Caird argued that the 'main lesson' of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* had been that the 'natural world is itself a symbol, vesture, or phenomenon of a spiritual or divine power'. Thus, in opposition to the Deism of the eighteenth century, the conclusion to be drawn was 'not that spirit interferes with matter, or miraculously works upon it from without, but that the material or sensible world is *itself*, in its deepest essence, spiritual'. 'No English writer in this century', Caird added, 'has done more to elevate and purify our ideals of life, and to make us conscious that the things of

³³ Wenley, 'Tis Sixty Years Since', 272-4, 277-8.

³⁴ James Hutchison Stirling, *Philosophy and Theology: Being the First Edinburgh University Gifford Lectures* (Edinburgh, 1890), 80-81, 120-21.

³⁵ Jones, *Browning*, 49-51. See also Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, 27-8, and Jones, 'Modern Scientific and Philosophic Thought', 509-10.

the spirit are real, and that, in the last resort, there is no other reality'.³⁶ As Caird explained the following year in 1893, the only way to meet the challenge of materialism would thus be

to carry the war into the enemy's quarters, and to maintain what Carlyle called a *Natural Supernaturalism*, i.e. the doctrine not that there are single miracles, but that the *universe is miraculous*; and that in order to conceive of it truly, we must think of it, not as a mechanical system occasionally broken in upon from above, but as an organism which implies a spiritual principle as its beginning and its end.³⁷

Caird's pupil, John Watson, concurred in this judgment, writing in 1894 that like 'the philosophy of Hegel', Carlyle's 'natural supernaturalism' had overcome 'all theories which assume a transcendental world', demonstrating that the 'spiritual world' was nothing but 'the actual world contemplated from the inside, or as it truly is'.³⁸ Similarly, in 1897 Andrew Seth argued that like Goethe, Lessing, Kant and Hegel, Carlyle had shown 'that the divine is not to be sought as a problematical Spirit beyond the Stars', but rather 'in the face of nature', and had thus overcome both 'Deism' and 'Materialism'

³⁶ Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', 246, 250-51, 256-7, 267.

³⁷ Edward Caird, *The Foundation of Religion: The Gifford Lectures Delivered Before the University of St Andrews in Sessions 1890-91 and 1891-92*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1893), i, 319-20. Caird's words were cited with approval by his former pupil, R. M. Wenley, *Contemporary Theology and Theism* (New York, 1897), 29.

³⁸ John Watson, 'The Problem of Hegel', *The Philosophical Review*, 3 (1894), 546-67, at 547-8. See also John Watson, 'The Idealism of Edward Caird. I.', *The Philosophical Review*, 18 (1909), 147-63, at 151-2.

within his doctrine of 'Natural Supernaturalism'.³⁹ In sum, as C. C. J. Webb explained in 1933, Carlyle had done more than any other nineteenth-century writer to undermine belief in the transcendence of God and the origin of the material world in an act of creation in time, and to put in its place an 'essentially immanentist' theology, drawn largely from the writings of the German Idealists.⁴⁰

History and Evolution

Having endorsed Carlyle's theology of immanence, the British Idealists also embraced his providential view of human history. In particular, they followed Carlyle in arguing that history was ultimately progressive, being the self-realization of a divine idea of Justice, and that 'Right' eventually made for 'Might' (*Past and Present*). As Edward Caird explained in 'The Genius of Carlyle' (1892), Carlyle's 'natural supernaturalism' implied a divine principle 'in human history, a divine justice which is always executing itself upon men and nations'.⁴¹ J. S. Mackenzie argued in 1894 that Carlyle's belief that 'the soul of the world is just' (*Past and Present*) had substantially the same meaning as Hegel's famous dictum that 'the Rational is Real', that is, that the 'Ideal' was realizing itself in human history.⁴² Somewhat later, in 1909, Andrew Seth

³⁹ Seth, *Two Lectures on Theism*, 10-12, 14-15. See also A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (New York, 1917), 154-8

⁴⁰ Clement C. J. Webb, *A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850* (Oxford, 1933), 8-9, 14-15, 33-6, quote at 66-7.

⁴¹ Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', 250-51, see also 254-5. See also Caird, *The Foundation of Religion*, ii, 7-12.

⁴² J. S. Mackenzie, 'Moral Sense and the Moral Life', *International Journal of Ethics*, 4 (1894), 160-73, at 168-9. See also J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Idea of Progress', *International Journal of Ethics*, 9 (1899),

Pringle-Pattison endorsed Carlyle's conception of 'history as a process controlled, in spite of human wilfulness or stupidity, by ultimate Justice and Goodness', while John Watson agreed with Carlyle's 'interpretation [of] history', namely that 'might is right'.⁴³ James Cappon, writing the same year, argued that Carlyle's belief in 'the unity of Might and Right' and conception of 'the Absolute as a vital process in history' in fact came very close to 'the Hegelian point of view'.⁴⁴ In 1915 J. H. Muirhead argued that Carlyle and the German Idealists had concurred in their 'conception of a moral purpose or Idea working in the ages'.⁴⁵

Just as the British Idealists had embraced Carlyle's 'Natural Supernaturalism' in response to the challenge of materialism, so they embraced his providential theory of history as a corrective to Darwinism.⁴⁶ For instance, in 1893 David G. Ritchie argued that Darwin's emphasis on evolution through 'variation, heredity [and] struggle for Existence' could be subsumed within Hegel's dialectical conception of historical progress. 'Whatever maintains itself', Ritchie explained, 'must do so because of some rationality that it has or had. When the rationality ceases, we have an appearance and not a reality, a sham that is doomed to perish. This, as we know, is the one lesson that

195-213, at 196, J. S. Mackenzie, 'Might and Right,' in James Bryce et al. (eds.), *The International Crisis: The Theory of the State* (London, 1916), 56-91, at 69-70, and Mackenzie, 'The Ethical Theory of Hegel', 357.

⁴³ Seth Pringle-Pattison, 'Introduction', xi; Watson, 'The Idealism of Edward Caird. I', 151-2.

⁴⁴ Cappon, *Edward Caird*, 279.

⁴⁵ J. H. Muirhead, *German Philosophy in Relation to the War* (London, 1915), 22-3.

⁴⁶ Indeed, this is remarkable, given that Carlyle himself, during his later life, had been given to railing against Darwin as an atheist. For similar appropriations of Carlyle by scientists, predominantly in the 1860s and 1870s, see Frank M. Turner, 'Victorian Scientific Naturalism and Thomas Carlyle', *Victorian Studies*, 18 (1975), 325-43. On the British Idealists' response to Darwinism, see generally Mander, *British Idealism*, 261-7.

Carlyle read in history'.⁴⁷ In 1894 Henry Jones argued that evolution could be understood as an ethical and moral process, whereby individualism progressively gave way to sociability. Jones wrote:

With no less clearness and wholeness of conviction than Darwin has taught the evolution of the animal kingdom, Carlyle has declared that in the kingdom of man the only Might is Right... the power which is making for righteousness is *in the world...* [and we may] trust the cosmic process, and believe that within the wide range of its long history it has secured, and will secure in the future, not only the Survival of the Fittest, but also the Triumph of the Best.

Furthermore, Jones added, the same great truth had been expressed in Hegel's claim that 'The Real is Rational', and 'Whatever, is, is Right'.⁴⁸ Several years later, in 1901, J. S. Mackenzie made the exact same claim, arguing that 'the modern theory of evolution' served to confirm both Carlyle's belief that 'Might makes Right' and Hegel's declaration that 'Whatever is actual is rational'.⁴⁹ In 1910 John MacCunn regretted that Carlyle had been unable to see the compatibility between his own 'Natural Supernaturalism' and Darwin's theory of evolution.⁵⁰ And, in 1931 J. H. Muirhead claimed that 'a more philosophical appreciation of the roots of his own teaching' would have led Carlyle 'to see that, if his own doctrine of the Right as the fittest and the only

⁴⁷ David G. Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel, with Other Philosophical Studies* (London, 1893), 56, 63, 69-70.

⁴⁸ Henry Jones, *Is the Order of Nature Opposed to the Moral Life? An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Glasgow on October 23rd, 1894* (Glasgow, 1894), 8-16, quotes on 11 and 16. See also Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, 22-4, 27-9, quotes on 27 and 29.

⁴⁹ J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Hegelian Point of View', *Mind*, 11 (1902), 54-71, at 67-8.

⁵⁰ MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 165-6.

fit to survive was the gospel truth he held it to be, Darwinism, properly interpreted, so far from being inconsistent with what he had himself been teaching from the beginning, was only a further illustration of it.’⁵¹

Moral and Ethical Philosophy

Having embraced Carlyle’s belief in the immanence of the divine in nature and history, the British Idealists also endorsed his doctrine of the immanence of the divine in man. In particular, they followed Carlyle in arguing that by the performance of ‘Duty’, the individual not only joined himself to the divine law of the universe, but also actively participated in the realization of its purposes.⁵² For instance, in 1891 Henry Jones argued that like ‘Kant and Lessing, Fichte and Schiller, Goethe and Hegel’, Carlyle had perceived ‘the infinite in the finite’, and had ‘showed us, in a word, that the world is spiritual, that loyalty to Duty is the foundation of all human good’.⁵³ In 1893 Edward Caird cited Carlyle in illustration of his claim that instead of seeking satisfaction in the ‘finite’ objects, desires and pleasures of the sensual world, man ought rather to look ‘to the Being who unites the outward and the inward worlds and who manifests himself in both’.⁵⁴ Similarly, in 1897 Andrew Seth claimed that the ‘Cosmos’

⁵¹ Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, 136-8, quote on 146. See also J. H. Muirhead, ‘The Inner Life in Relation to Morality: A Study in the Elements of Religion’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 1 (1891), 169-86, at 171-5, 185-6, and Webb, *A Study of Religious Thought*, 8-15, esp. 14-15.

⁵² For an early recognition of this, see [J. H. Stirling], ‘Letters on Carlyle’, 148.

⁵³ Jones, *Browning*, 53-4, 67-8.

⁵⁴ Caird, *The Foundation of Religion*, i, 77-80. Caird also quoted Hegel to the same effect (i, 82-3). See also John Watson, *An Outline of Philosophy with Notes Historical and Critical*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow, 1898), 201-2, John S. Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy* (Glasgow, 1890), 121-3, John S.

had a moral and spiritual purpose, ‘an End-in-itself, as Kant called it, [that] we find only in the self-conscious life of man, in the world of Truth, Beauty and Goodness which he builds up for himself, and of which he constitutes himself a citizen’. Continuing, Seth noted how Carlyle had also expressed his ‘conviction of the infinite significance and value of the ethical life’, and his belief that ‘here only, in the life of ethical endeavour, is the end and secret of the universe to be found’.⁵⁵ Writing in 1901, R. M. Wenley pointed out that Carlyle’s ‘cosmology’ flowed directly into his ‘anthropology’, in the sense that ‘human nature’, having ‘developed in the ‘natural supernatural’ course of events’, bore within it ‘its own characteristic ‘manifestation’ of the immanent divine principle’. As such, Wenley continued, man occupied ‘the unique position of being a direct co-worker with God’.⁵⁶ For Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, writing in 1909, ‘for Carlyle, the acceptance of the law of Duty as the inmost law of things *is* belief in God, the only effective belief conceivable’, while for J. H. Muirhead, writing in 1912, Carlyle had followed Plato, Aristotle and Kant in teaching that ‘fidelity to Duty is not only the one condition of inward peace, but the preserving principle of human society and the way of access into the Divine purpose of creation’.⁵⁷ Shortly thereafter, in 1914, R. B. Haldane delivered a lecture to the undergraduate students of the University of Edinburgh, in which he quoted from a ‘book, which in my time at the University was

Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics Designed for the Use of Students* (London, 1892), 316, 312, 308, 302, J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Infinite and the Perfect’, *Mind*, 13 (1904), 355-78, at 357-61, 365-6, 369-72, and J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Meaning of Good and Evil’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 21 (1911), 251-68, at 267-8.

⁵⁵ Andrew Seth, *Man’s Place in the Cosmos and Other Essays* (Edinburgh and London, 1897), 13-15, 26-9. See also Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God*, 156-8.

⁵⁶ Wenley, ‘Some Lights on the British Idealistic Movement’, 470.

⁵⁷ Seth Pringle-Pattison, ‘Introduction’, xi-xii; Muirhead, ‘Ethics’, 416.

much read, and which is, I think, still much read, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*'. Here, Haldane explained, Carlyle had identified the source of spiritual 'disease' as 'vanity and the claim for happiness', teaching that 'it is only with renunciation that the world can be said to begin'. 'Looked at in the light that comes from the Eternal within our breasts', Haldane continued, what mattered 'was that we should be ready to accept with willingness the burden and the obligation which life had cast on us individually, and be able to see that in accepting it, hard as it might be to do so, we were choosing a blessedness which meant far more for us than what is commonly called happiness could'.⁵⁸ A similar point was made in 1921 by Hugh Adam Reyburn, who argued that 'Carlyle, who did not know Hegel's philosophy', had nonetheless 'gathered much of its import', particularly in his understanding that the 'ideal' was 'the active principle of reality itself', being 'present in every phase of the moral world and embodied in every good action'.⁵⁹ In other words, as J. H. Muirhead put it in 1928, Carlyle had seen that 'the ideal was no "far-off divine event" but something to be realized here-and-now', particularly through the performance of 'Duty'.⁶⁰

As the British Idealists made clear, Carlyle's belief in the immanence of the divine in man thus issued in a strongly ethical orientation, in which self-mastery, moral excellence, and the practical exercise of virtue took precedence over all else. As such, the British Idealists frequently highlighted Carlyle's debts to ancient Greek moral

⁵⁸ R. B. Haldane, *The Conduct of Life: And Other Addresses* (London, 1914), 4-9.

⁵⁹ Hugh A. Reyburn, *The Ethical Theory of Hegel: A Study of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford, 1921), 192-3.

⁶⁰ John H. Muirhead, *The Use of Philosophy: Californian Addresses* (London, 1928), 27, see also 57-8, 61-2.

philosophy, particularly Cynicism and Stoicism.⁶¹ For instance, in 1894 James Seth explained how the Cynics had taught that

Happiness... is to be sought within, not without; in virtue or excellence of character, not in pleasure... This is the constant text of Cynic morality – the supremacy of the human spirit over circumstance, its mastery of its own fortunes, founded on the sovereignty of reason over passion. The sum of Cynic wisdom is the sublime pride of the masterful rational self, which can acknowledge no other rule than its own, and which makes its possessor a king in a world of slaves.

Such doctrines, Seth admitted, had at times ‘led the Cynics into strange extravagance and fanaticism’, particularly ‘contempt for their fellows, whom they regarded, like Carlyle, as “mostly fools”’.⁶² In 1902 J. S. Mackenzie argued that a strong emphasis on practical morality had been common to Socrates, the Stoics, Kant, Fichte and Carlyle, while, several years later, in 1917, Mackenzie referred to ‘the favourite doctrine of Carlyle, that all excellence is based on moral excellence’, commenting that this was akin to ‘the Stoical attribution of every kind of excellence to their wise man’.⁶³ And, in

⁶¹ On Carlyle and Cynicism, see Alexander Jordan, ‘That Scotch Diogenes: Thomas Carlyle and Cynicism’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (forthcoming). On Carlyle and Stoicism, see Alexander Jordan, ‘Noble Just Industrialism: Saint-Simonism in the Political Thought of Thomas Carlyle’, unpublished Ph.D thesis (European University Institute, 2015), ch. 1.

⁶² James Seth, *A Study of Ethical Principles* (Edinburgh and London, 1894), 155-7. See also John MacCunn, ‘The Cynics’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 14 (1904), 185-200, at 185; MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 163.

⁶³ John S. Mackenzie, *Outlines of Metaphysics* (London, 1902), 119-21; J. S. Mackenzie, *Elements of Constructive Philosophy* (London, 1917), 306-7. See also J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Source of Moral Obligation’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 10 (1900), 464-78, at 464-6, J. S. Mackenzie, ‘Ethical

1924 R. M. Wenley explained how the ‘Stoics’ had ‘set pursuit of the ideal above pleasure, insisting that the freedom of the rational soul in thought, manifesting itself in effort to produce a type of character, *ought* to rule life’. This doctrine, Wenley argued, was not only discernible in the claim of Schiller, ‘a semi-Stoic’, that ‘to be a moral being is man’s destiny’, but also in the belief of Carlyle that ‘man is able to help himself, on his own resources, nay, to help deity’.⁶⁴

However, many of the British Idealists were keen to emphasize that Carlyle’s doctrines regarding ‘Duty’ implied not only self-denial and self-sacrifice, but also a large measure of self-development and self-realization, that is, the duty to develop what was best in oneself, and to make the fullest possible use of one’s faculties for the benefit of one’s fellows. Once again, an ancient Greek reference was frequently invoked to elucidate this point, namely Aristotle. For example, during the 1890s, J. S. Mackenzie repeatedly drew attention to Carlyle’s distinction between ‘happiness’ and ‘blessedness’ (*Sartor Resartus*), arguing that while the former consisted in mere sensual pleasure and ‘animal enjoyments’, the latter consisted in rational activity, ‘the realization of a higher

Religion’, *Hibbert Journal*, 18 (1920), 687-701, at 695-6, John MacCunn, *The Making of Character: Some Educational Aspects of Ethics* (Cambridge, 1900), 100-101, and John MacCunn, *Liverpool Addresses on Ethics of Social Work* (Liverpool, 1911), 190-93.

⁶⁴ R. M. Wenley, *Stoicism and its Influence* (London, 1924), 159-60, 164. However, some British Idealists feared that such an extreme emphasis on ‘Duty’ would result in mere ascetism, and a rejection of all speculative thought. See Jones, *Browning*, 86-7, Henry Jones, ‘Philosophical Landmarks’, *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, 1 (1915), 195-225, at 209-10, Henry Jones, ‘The Obligations and Principles of Citizenship’, *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, 6 (1919), 119-42, at 129-34, 152, Henry Jones, *The Principles of Citizenship* (London, 1919), 47-8, and Jones, *A Faith that Enquires*, 7-14, 50-51. See also J. Clark Murray, *An Introduction to Ethics* (Paisley, 1891), 351-62, esp. 354-5, Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 229-33, J. S. Mackenzie, *Fundamental Problems of Life: An Essay on Citizenship as Pursuit of Values* (London, 1928), 244-5, and MacCunn, *The Making of Character*, 209-10.

life' and the 'consciousness of doing right'.⁶⁵ Similarly, in 1891 and 1908 J. Clark Murray claimed that Carlyle's distinction between 'happiness' and 'blessedness' was substantially the same as Aristotle's distinction between 'Hedonism' and 'Eudemonism', i.e. the difference between, on the one hand, mere selfish pleasure-seeking, and, on the other, the habitual striving to develop one's 'higher self' through discipline and training.⁶⁶ For his part, J. H. Muirhead argued in 1892 and 1900 that both Carlyle and Aristotle had protested 'against the attempt to identify happiness with any mere state of passive satisfaction, e.g. pleasure', instead locating it in 'activity of the soul according to excellence'.⁶⁷ And, in 1904 John MacCunn argued that unlike the Cynics, both Carlyle and Aristotle had understood that 'the best gifts of the soul' could be attained only 'by acting in the world, not by withdrawing from it in an impotent fancied superiority'.⁶⁸

More specifically, many of the British Idealists followed Carlyle in arguing that within a modern commercial society, the most appropriate arena for duty and self-realization was the world of work.⁶⁹ For example, in 1892 J. S. Mackenzie endorsed 'Carlyle's commandment', 'Know what thou canst work at; and work at it, like a Hercules' (*Past and Present*). By labouring, Mackenzie added, one demonstrated one's

⁶⁵ Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, 294; Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 110; J. S. Mackenzie, 'Rational Hedonism', *International Journal of Ethics*, 5 (1895), 218-31, at 221(n).

⁶⁶ Clark Murray, *An Introduction to Ethics*, 384-5; J. Clark Murray, *A Handbook of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1908), 115-17.

⁶⁷ J. H. Muirhead, *The Elements of Ethics* (London, 1892), 97-8; J. H. Muirhead, *Chapters from Aristotle's Ethics* (London, 1900), 43-5.

⁶⁸ MacCunn, 'The Cynics', 199, see also 189-91.

⁶⁹ See Jordan, 'Noble Just Industrialism', ch. 1.

‘faith in human progress’, and thus one’s ‘love of God’.⁷⁰ The same year, J. H.

Muirhead agreed with Aristotle that virtue was the product of habit, commenting:

The conduct of the hand and eye and intellect in daily work is as much moral conduct as the voluntary dealings with ourselves and others outside that work.

An artisan or an artist or a writer who does not ‘do his best’ is not only an inferior workman, but a bad man.

In a footnote, Muirhead then added: ‘Carlyle once said of a joiner who was doing a job in his house in Chelsea that he “broke the whole decalogue with every stroke of his hammer”’.⁷¹ In 1894 James Seth argued that ‘the only true ideal’ of human life was ‘activity of the soul or self’. ‘Happiest’, Seth declared, ‘is he who can put his whole soul, all the energies of his spirit, into each day’s work.’ Such work, Seth claimed, would serve ‘as the means of spiritual expression and expansion’. Thus, Seth added, ‘we feel, for example, that Carlyle’s appreciation of his father’s masonry is essentially a true appreciation’.⁷² Subsequently, in 1911 J. B. Baillie rejected the ‘Hebrew’ conception of labour, namely as ‘a necessary evil, a kind of punishment’, arguing that labour often served as an ‘expression and development of the individual life which it brings about’.

⁷⁰ Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 199. See also Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, 272, and Mackenzie, *Fundamental Problems*, 103-4.

⁷¹ Muirhead, *The Elements of Ethics*, 44-5. See also H. J. W. Hetherington and J. H. Muirhead, *Social Purpose: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Civic Society* (London, 1918), 181, 184.

⁷² Seth, *A Study of Ethical Principles*, 257-9. Seth then quoted the relevant passage from Carlyle’s *Reminiscences*, viz., ‘Nothing that [my father] undertook but he did it faithfully, and like a true man. I shall look on the houses he built with a certain proud interest. They stand firm and sound to the heart all over this little district... They are little texts for me of the gospel of man’s free will’.

As such, Baillie claimed, ‘a man’s labour *is* his moral life, in one of the forms in which his moral life is lived’. Continuing, Baillie wrote:

Carlyle once said of a bad workman engaged on a job in Carlyle’s house, that he broke the whole decalogue with every stroke of his hammer. And the remark goes to the root of the meaning of labour, so far as the labourer is concerned. We cannot separate the way a man does the task from the task which he does. The result will inevitably vary with what the man is and the way he does it.⁷³

Similarly, around the same time, Henry Jones argued that ‘labour is meant to dignify the labourer’, making him ‘a better man’. ‘The energies which he sets free upon his handicraft’, Jones continued, ‘are capable, as every honest workman knows, of coming back to him enriched; bringing with them more skill, the consciousness of a duty well done’. In support of his claim, Jones then cited at length from Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, to the effect that only those who worked, whether by hand or by head, were worthy of honour.⁷⁴ And, in 1928 J. H. Muirhead told his audience:

There is no deeper saying in human language than the old ‘laborare est orare.’

On this Carlyle once truly commented: ‘I find that a man cannot make a pair of shoes rightly unless he does it in a devout manner... All work properly so called

⁷³ J. B. Baillie, ‘The Moral and Legal Aspects of Labour’, *The Philosophical Review*, 20 (1911), 249-64, at 251-2, 255, 258.

⁷⁴ Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, 120-22.

is an appeal from the Seen to the Unseen – a devout calling on the Higher Powers’ (*Past and Present*).⁷⁵

Unsurprisingly, this lofty ethical philosophy implied an extreme hostility towards the sceptical Epicureanism that had been propounded by David Hume and Jeremy Bentham, as well as towards the more sophisticated utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill. Following Carlyle, the British Idealists argued that in reducing human motivation to self-interested considerations of pleasure and pain, the utilitarian not only degraded human beings to the level of animals, but also undermined any concept of moral obligation.⁷⁶ As J. H. Muirhead explained in 1892, such mistaken ideas had a long historical pedigree, dating back to the Cyrenaics and Epicureans. However, whereas the ancient Epicureans had been unabashedly individualistic, their modern counterparts had been preoccupied with how to extract morality and sociability from self-interest. To do so, they had relied primarily on prudential calculations regarding the long-term balance of pleasures and pains, and on external ‘sanctions’ such as the pressure of ‘public opinion’. However, Muirhead argued, ‘conduct which issues from regard for these

⁷⁵ Muirhead, *The Use of Philosophy*, 64-5. See also J. H. Muirhead, ‘The Spirit of Democracy’, *Hibbert Journal*, 22 (1923), 427-35, at 427-8. To be sure, certain British Idealists qualified their praise, stressing the importance of cultivated leisure. See for example Muirhead, *Chapters from Aristotle*, 43-5, and Mackenzie, *Fundamental Problems*, 217-20. Moreover, as we shall see below, many of the British Idealists also acknowledged that considerable social reform would be required in order to realize work’s full potential.

⁷⁶ See Alexander Jordan, ‘David Hume is Pontiff of the World: Thomas Carlyle on Epicureanism, Laissez-Faire, and Public Opinion’, *Journal of British Studies*, 56 (2017), 557-79.

sanctions is *not* morality’, a point that Carlyle had made in *Sartor Resartus*.⁷⁷ In 1902 Henry Laurie wrote in reference to Hume’s ethical philosophy:

The mere facts of pleasure and desire do not contain within them the imperative command of duty... Hume [does not] explain how the end of personal happiness, or the fitness of means to that end, can generate the idea of moral obligation. The consciousness of integrity is doubtless requisite, as he remarks, to the happiness of the honest man; but while the happiness springs from the consciousness, the obligation cannot be conjured from the happiness. And if all that honesty can plead for itself is that it is the best policy, then, as Carlyle has said, the world had better count its spoons to begin with, and look out for hurricanes and earthquakes to end with.⁷⁸

In 1891 J. S. Mackenzie wrote that Carlyle had been fundamentally correct in condemning the works of Jeremy Bentham as a ‘pig philosophy’ (*Latter-Day Pamphlets*), a crude hedonism and individualism that was capable only of negation and destruction.⁷⁹ According to John MacCunn, writing in 1910, John Stuart Mill had seen, as ‘Carlyle saw with still clearer eyes’, that the ‘hedonism’ of Bentham ‘was impotent to justify and still more to evoke sacrifice’.⁸⁰ However, according to several other

⁷⁷ Muirhead, *The Elements of Ethics*, 92-8, quotes on 95-6, 98. See also J. H. Muirhead, *The Service of the State: Four Lectures on the Political Teaching of T. H. Green* (London, 1908), 27.

⁷⁸ Henry Laurie, *Scottish Philosophy in Its National Development* (Glasgow, 1902), 89.

⁷⁹ J. S. Mackenzie, ‘A Fragment on Government. By Jeremy Bentham. Edited with an Introduction, by F. C. Montague’, *Economic Journal*, 1 (1891), 434-7, at 434-6. See also David G. Ritchie, *Natural Rights: A Criticism of Some Political and Ethical Conceptions* (London, 1895), 94-5.

⁸⁰ MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 61.

British Idealists, Mill's attempt to introduce an emphasis on disinterested sociability into utilitarianism had ultimately failed, and Carlyle's objections still stood. For example, in an early essay (c. 1867-9), F. H. Bradley claimed that Mill's injunction to seek the happiness of others contradicted the utilitarian premises of his philosophy, since for the utilitarian, the happiness of others ultimately had no value except as a means to one's own. Moreover, Bradley continued, Mill's attempt to introduce a distinction between the 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures was entirely arbitrary, since there was no guarantee that people would prefer the former to the latter. According to Bradley, pleasure was not only subjective, varying from individual to individual, but also frequently brought individuals into conflict with each other. As such, it could not provide an objective, *a priori*, universal 'moral law' or 'categorical Imperative'. To clinch his point, Bradley then cited from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, viz., 'Love not Pleasure; love God'.⁸¹ Writing in 1911, W. R. Sorley argued that Mill's call to seek the happiness of others was 'apt to lose hold of the will', since it lacked any concept of properly 'Religious Virtue', that is, a faith in divine providence. Carlyle, Sorley added, was one of those who had clearly understood this point.⁸²

However, in some cases, the British Idealists' emphasis on duty, practical morality and self-realization also implied considerable hostility towards certain aspects of Christian theology, notably the preoccupation with individual salvation, and the reliance on other-worldly rewards and punishments. Indeed, following Carlyle, several

⁸¹ F. H. Bradley, 'Utility as (1) and End or (2) Standard of Morality' [c. 1867 – 9], in *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley*, ed. Carol A. Keene and W. J. Mander, 12 vols (Bristol, 1999), i, 50-56, quote from Carlyle on 56. Here, Bradley is putting forward a rough version of the Kantian categorical imperative, a move that was also made by Carlyle. See Alexander Jordan, 'Thomas Carlyle on Epicureanism in the French and German Enlightenments', *Historical Journal*, 61 (2018), 673-94.

⁸² W. R. Sorley, *The Moral Life and Moral Worth* (Cambridge, 1911), 129-33.

of the British Idealists argued that this kind of Christian Epicureanism merely multiplied selfishness and sensuality into all eternity.⁸³ For instance, in 1882 A. C. Bradley argued that ‘the essence of religion is not at all the wish to be happy’, but rather ‘the entire devotion of personal will’ to ‘ideal truth, beauty and goodness’. Indeed, as ‘Carlyle’, ‘a great seer’, had pointed out, ‘the only happiness a brave man ever troubled himself with asking much about was, happiness enough to get his work done’ (*Past and Present*).⁸⁴ In 1892 J. H. Muirhead pointed out that unlike ancient Epicureanism, modern Epicureanism had often relied on religious sanctions, that is, heaven and hell, to promote moral conduct. However, Muirhead claimed, ‘conduct which issues from regard for these sanctions is *not* morality’. Far preferable, Muirhead added, was the ideal of ‘Blessedness’ set out by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*.⁸⁵ The same year, J. S. Mackenzie, in a lecture to the members of the London Ethical Society, stated that ‘we have grown dissatisfied with Christianity’, since ‘Christianity was an individualistic religion’. Rather than seeking ‘the salvation of the soul’ in the next world, Mackenzie argued, one ought instead to seek ‘the salvation of society’ within ‘the life of the State’. In order to ‘enlarge the sense of public duty’, and to promote ‘the development of human society, the working out of that which is highest and best’, Mackenzie concluded, a ‘new religion’ would be required, the rudiments of which could already be ‘found in the writings of Carlyle’.⁸⁶ Perhaps most strikingly, in 1912 William Jethro Brown

⁸³ See Alexander Jordan, ‘A Drudge’s Bargain: Thomas Carlyle on Christian Epicureanism’, *Historical Research* (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ A. C. Bradley, ‘Some Points in ‘Natural Religion’’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 47 (1882), 144-60, at 159-60.

⁸⁵ Muirhead, *The Elements of Ethics*, 93-8.

⁸⁶ J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Three Religions’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 2 (1892), 327-42, at 329-31, 334-41. See also J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Use of Moral Ideas in Politics’, *International Journal of*

argued that Benthamism and Evangelicalism were both forms of individualism, a philosophy that was increasingly obsolete. ‘The thought of our day’, Brown claimed, ‘is intolerant of the individual whose supreme concern is the salvation of his own soul’. Indeed, Brown added, Carlyle had ‘expressed this intolerance with characteristic vigour’, particularly in his polemic against ‘Methodism’ as a ‘new phasis of *Egoism*, stretched out into the Infinite’ (*Past and Present*). However, Brown claimed, individualism was already being supplanted by Idealism, which directed men not towards a transcendent heaven, but rather towards the ethical life of the State.⁸⁷

Social and political thought

As early as 1846, one contemporary noted that thanks to ‘the erratic and versatile genius of Carlyle’, ‘idealistic principles of legislation’ were fast ‘gaining ground’.⁸⁸ Indeed, by 1892, Edward Caird could declare that Carlyle had been ‘the source of so many of the most important social and political movements of the present day’, having ‘set before us as our aim, not any single measure of reform, but a new idea of political and social life’.⁸⁹

In particular, the British Idealists attached great importance to Carlyle’s polemic against Epicurean thinkers such as David Hume and Jeremy Bentham, who had denied any natural propensity for sociability, and had attempted instead to found social and political life on enlightened self-interest. This had involved a fundamentally negative

Ethics, 12 (1901), 1-23, at 13-14.

⁸⁷ W. Jethro Brown, *The Underlying Principles of Modern Legislation* (London, 1912), 89-91. See also Jones, *Order of Nature*, 11.

⁸⁸ Morell, *Historical and Critical View*, ii, 483-5.

⁸⁹ Caird, ‘The Genius of Carlyle’, 234. See also Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, 127.

concept of liberty, in which the state largely left individuals free to pursue their own interests, applying limited checks and balances only when necessary.⁹⁰ For instance, in 1891 Henry Jones credited Carlyle with having refuted Hume's belief that man was 'a being animated solely by the sensuous springs of pleasure and pain', and that 'society was a gathering of mere individuals, repelling each other by their needs and greed, with a ring of natural necessity to bind them together'.⁹¹ Similarly, in 1907 Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison also praised Carlyle's polemic against the 'sensationalism' and 'individualism' of Hume, which had treated 'society as an aggregate of mutually exclusive units, each pursuing as sole end his own individual pleasure'. As Carlyle had shown, such attempts to evolve 'social and benevolent action from the play of individual selfishness' were doomed to failure.⁹² Writing in 1909, John Watson agreed with Carlyle that the utilitarian theories of Bentham and his followers amounted to little more than 'Anarchy *plus* the street-constable', having 'overlooked the fundamental nature of the State, as not an arbitrary association of independent units, but an expression of the social nature of man'.⁹³

In the economic sphere, the British Idealists followed Carlyle in denouncing the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, which, they claimed, tended to reduce national life to the selfish pursuit of material wealth, to degrade all human relations into a mere 'cash-

⁹⁰ See Jordan, 'David Hume is Pontiff of the World'. For contemporary acknowledgement of the continuities between Carlyle and the British Idealists in this regard, see G. Sabine, 'The Social Origin of Absolute Idealism', *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 12 (1915), 169-77, at 169-70.

⁹¹ Jones, *Browning*, 52-3.

⁹² A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Philosophic Radicals and Other Essays, with Chapters Reprinted on the Philosophy of Religion in Kant and Hegel* (Edinburgh and London, 1907), 63-4. See also A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 1930), 19.

⁹³ Watson, 'The Idealism of Edward Caird. I.', 156-7.

nexus', and, in short, to deteriorate into anarchy. Moreover, they also followed Carlyle in arguing that the worst symptom of such anarchy was the suffering of the working classes. For instance, in his lecture 'Carlyle and St. Simon' (1888), Edward Caird noted that Carlyle had considered his era to be 'a period of division and even of anarchy', in which 'cash payment is the sole nexus of man to man'. Even if 'men are now less directly under the control, and exposed to the injustice, of other individuals', Caird argued, 'they seem more liable to incalculable disaster from the vast machine of trade, which by sudden changes disturbs and unsettles the course of their lives, and makes their labour and skill suddenly worthless'.⁹⁴ And, in a subsequent text, Caird endorsed Carlyle's judgement that '*Laissez faire*' was ultimately 'negative rather than positive, a disintegrating rather than a uniting force'.⁹⁵ J. S. Mackenzie made substantially the same point in 1890, writing:

The evils of the 'cash nexus' were exhibited by Carlyle, with his usual emphasis... The slavery is no longer that of one person another, but rather that of persons to things. This *is* a kind of slavery, however; for if a person is under the control of a thing, *i.e.* a mere mechanical necessity, he is himself reduced to the condition of a thing even more thoroughly than if he were under the absolute control of another person.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Edward Caird, 'Carlyle and St. Simon: or, the Moral Aspect of the Economical Problem', *Time*, 18 (1888), 1-18, at 7-12.

⁹⁵ Edward Caird, 'Address After the Queen's Death' [1901], in *idem.*, *Lay Sermons and Addresses* (Glasgow, 1907), 123-50, at 140-41.

⁹⁶ Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, 104-5.

Two years later, in 1892, Mackenzie invoked Carlyle in support of a strongly republican diatribe against ‘Social Corruption’, citing ‘Carlyle’s opinion’ that current social arrangements seemed expressly ‘calculated’ for the ‘strangling’ of ‘heroic virtue’ (Carlyle, *The Opera*). ‘Among the rich’, Mackenzie continued, ‘luxury is encouraged’, and ‘men are tempted to seek the satisfaction of [such false wants] by dishonourable means’. At the same time, ‘the poor’ were ‘exploited – i.e. used as a mere means for the advantages of others’. ‘When a nation has reached such a stage as this’, Mackenzie concluded, ‘it often declines and falls’, ‘unless it is reawakened by a reformer, such as in our own time Carlyle’.⁹⁷ In 1894 John MacCunn cited Carlyle’s judgement that Britain could no longer be called a ‘Society’, being more like ‘a common and overcrowded Lodging-house, where each, isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbour, clutches what he can get’ (*Sartor Resartus*). Despite a degree of exaggeration, MacCunn commented, Carlyle’s words effectively captured ‘the disintegrating spirit of individual competition, which is Fraternity’s very negation’.⁹⁸ In 1907 Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison praised Carlyle for having denounced the followers of Bentham, the so-called ‘Philosophic Radicals’, for their dogmatic commitment to the ‘abstract and negative’ doctrine of ‘Laissez-faire’, and their indifference to the sufferings of the poor.⁹⁹ And, in 1928 J. H. Muirhead expressed severe disquiet

⁹⁷ Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 261. See also Mackenzie, ‘The Idea of Progress’, 196-8, Mackenzie, ‘The Source of Moral Obligation’, 468-71, and Bernard Bosanquet, ‘Les Idées politiques de Rousseau’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 20 (1912), 321-40, at 322, 324.

⁹⁸ John MacCunn, *Ethics of Citizenship* (Glasgow, 1894), 27-8. See also MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 48-51.

⁹⁹ Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Philosophic Radicals*, 26-7. See also Seth Pringle-Pattison, ‘Introduction’, xiii-xiv. See also John Clark Murray, *The Industrial Kingdom of God* [c. 1887], ed. Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott (Ottawa, 1981), 251, J. H. Muirhead, *Birmingham Institutions: Lectures Given at the*

regarding his contemporaries' obsession with the pursuit of material wealth, and with the improvement of the 'machinery' that served as a means to it. The effect, Muirhead claimed, was to make 'mind itself a [mere] means or an instrument for manipulating [natural] forces for individual or corporate advantage, in the last instance for the increase of enjoyment, as the average man counts enjoyment'. 'Carlyle' he added, 'just about a century ago called attention to all this in his epoch-making essay on the *Signs of the Times*', and 'what he there says has been verified to the letter and on a scale that even he failed to predict'.¹⁰⁰

According to the British Idealists, Carlyle had also been correct in identifying a tendency to extend the principles of *laissez faire* into politics, particularly through a theory of democracy founded on the representation of 'interests' and 'public opinion'. Such a theory, they argued, tended to dispense with any need for virtue, patriotism, or wisdom amongst electors.¹⁰¹ Moreover, it also tended to result in a tyranny of the majority, in which the wise and the virtuous were shouted down by the mob. For instance, in 1894 John MacCunn argued that Carlyle had been right to oppose 'the transference of this individualistic principle... from commerce and industry into the larger domain of politics', and more specifically 'the memorable attempt of Bentham and the Benthamites to found Democracy firmly and forever on a theory of self-interest'.¹⁰² In 1899 Bernard Bosanquet rejected any attempt to determine 'the good of the State' through 'the study of mere public opinion', or the 'particular judgements' of

University (Birmingham, 1911), 237-9, and Brown, *Underlying Principles*, 311-14.

¹⁰⁰ Muirhead, *The Use of Philosophy*, 55-6. See also James Cappon, 'Democracy and Monarchy in the Modern State', *Queen's Quarterly*, 24 (1916), 76-114, at 82-3, and James Cappon, 'Bourgeois and Bolshevik', *Queen's Quarterly*, 26 (1918), 339-62, at 342-6.

¹⁰¹ See Jordan, 'David Hume is Pontiff of the World'.

¹⁰² MacCunn, *Ethics of Citizenship*, 27-8.

‘individuals’. The latter, he argued, were frequently ‘full of falsehood and vanity’, being, as Carlyle had pointed out, ‘mostly fools’.¹⁰³ In 1905 R. M. Wenley identified Carlyle’s opposition to such theories of democracy with Plato’s opposition to the Sophists, an analogy that was repeated by several other British Idealists.¹⁰⁴ Most notably, in 1906 J. S. Mackenzie remarked that Plato, Aristotle, and Carlyle had all opposed Democracy on the grounds that it promoted licentiousness and mindless hedonism, while also granting equality to those who were not equal. In particular, Mackenzie argued that Carlyle had been right to oppose the extension of *laissez faire* into politics, writing:

Democracy is too often conceived as meaning simply a state in which one has an eye to his own interest; and it is sometimes supposed that in this way the interests of all will be served... [However, the] mere struggle of competing interests cannot reasonably be expected to lead to the good of the whole. In economics this is now, I believe, pretty generally recognized; pure *laissez faire* is a discredited principle. But is it any more reliable in general politics? ... we must recognize that this is a real danger confronting our modern democratic states; and it is one of the dangers that was much in the minds of Carlyle and Ruskin, as well as in that of Aristotle.

Furthermore, Mackenzie argued, Carlyle had been ‘to a large extent right’ in opposing ‘an exaggerated deference to majorities’. Indeed, such a ‘merely mechanical’ approach could not be trusted to reveal ‘the true general will’, since the majority were frequently

¹⁰³ Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London, 1899), 286-7.

¹⁰⁴ R. M. Wenley, *The Affinity of Plato’s ‘Republic’ for Modern Thought* (Berkeley, CA, 1905), 204.

misled and manipulated by demagogues. Moreover, it also tended to result in ‘a constant silencing’ of the wise and virtuous minority, it being ‘perhaps this, more than anything else, that Carlyle has in view in his denunciations of Democracy’.¹⁰⁵

In opposition to such Epicurean or utilitarian theories, the British Idealists followed Carlyle in propounding a strongly ethical concept of the State, in which the latter was conceived as an educational and civilizing institution, serving to promote good moral character, self-realization and human flourishing (in other words, ‘positive liberty’).¹⁰⁶ Frequently, Carlyle was thus associated with Plato, particularly in his emphasis on political conformity with the divine law of Justice that animated the universe.¹⁰⁷ As early as 1865, Edward Caird pointed out that ‘in the *Republic*, Plato, like half the great moral teachers, down even to our own Carlyle, turns the question, “What is my right?” into the *other* question, “What is my duty?”... and maintains... that duties, not rights, are to be considered in the foundation of the state’.¹⁰⁸ Three decades later, in 1892, Caird reiterated this judgement, referring to ‘how much [Carlyle] did to banish the eighteenth-century theory of the limitations of the government to the functions of a grand policeman, and to revive the old Platonic idea that the State had a social and

¹⁰⁵ J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Dangers of Democracy’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 16 (1906), 129-45, at 132-3, 141-2, 135-8. See also J. S. Mackenzie, ‘Some Thoughts on Democracy’, *Sociological Review*, 4 (1911), 232-43, at 234.

¹⁰⁶ For contemporary acknowledgement of the continuities between Carlyle and the British Idealists in this regard, see Sabine, ‘The Social Origin of Absolute Idealism’, 170-73, and E. S. P. Haynes, ‘Liberty and the State’, *English Review*, 28 (1919), 59-66, at 60.

¹⁰⁷ On the importance of Plato to the British Idealists, see generally Mander, *British Idealism*, 73-82.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Caird, ‘Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates’, *North British Review*, 43 (1865), 351-84, at 354. This was a basically hostile review of George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates* (1865), Grote being a Benthamite and utilitarian.

ethical work to perform'.¹⁰⁹ In 1895 Bernard Bosanquet wrote of how both Plato and Carlyle had believed that the 'laws of the state' ought to 'copy or embody the actual principles of justice which are involved in human nature and society and the course of the world'.¹¹⁰ And, shortly thereafter, in 1897, R. L. Nettleship noted that like Carlyle, Plato had ridiculed 'the legislative reformers of his own time', who had placed their faith in constitutional mechanisms, maintaining instead that that 'the great problem for the statesman is to keep up a certain character among the citizens'.¹¹¹ Thus, as John MacCunn pointed out in 1910, both Plato and Carlyle had seen 'politics' and 'ethics' as one and the same.¹¹² According to A. C. Bradley, writing in 1880, Carlyle's concept of the State also resembled that of Aristotle, particularly in having as its end the fullest possible development of human nature, and the spiritual freedom of its citizens. As such, the State was not a 'community in mere living', serving to facilitating the production of material wealth, but rather a 'community in *good* living', existing to make its 'citizens good and just men'.¹¹³ In a somewhat more modern reference, several of the British

¹⁰⁹ Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', 266.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Bosanquet, *A Companion to Plato's Republic for English Readers: Being a Commentary adapted to Davies and Vaughan's Translation*, 2nd ed. (London, 1895), 269.

¹¹¹ Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Philosophical Lectures and Remains*, ed. A. C. Bradley and G. R. Benson, 2 vols (London, 1897), ii, 131-43, reference to Carlyle at 143.

¹¹² MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 178. See also W. Jethro Brown, *The Austinian Theory of Law* (London, 1906), 372.

¹¹³ A. C. Bradley, 'Aristotle's Conception of the State', in E. Abbott (ed.), *Hellenica: A Collection of Essays on Greek Poetry, Philosophy, History and Religion* (London, 1880), 181-243, at 193-4, 198-200. See also Jones, *Browning*, 67-8, Jones, 'Modern Scientific and Philosophic Thought', 513-14, A. R. Lord, *The Principles of Politics: An Introduction to the Study of the Evolution of Political Ideas* (Oxford, 1921), 291, and Muirhead, *The Use of Philosophy*, 82, 86. On the importance of Aristotle to the British Idealists, see generally Mander, *British Idealism*, 82-6.

Idealists implied that in seeking to revive an ethical, idealistic concept of the State, Carlyle had been engaged in fundamentally the same endeavour as Hegel.¹¹⁴

In the economic sphere, the British Idealists followed Carlyle in demanding substantial measures of state intervention and regulation. These, they argued, would solve the so-called ‘social problem’ by bringing the working classes within the ethical life of the State, and would also realise the potential of labour to become a means of moral and spiritual fulfilment. However, the British Idealists often qualified their support for Carlyle’s proposals, stressing that any such reforms ought to help the working classes to help themselves, enhancing rather than stifling independence and autonomy. Moreover, they also stressed that in the last analysis, the success of such reforms would rely upon the active participation and patriotism of the working classes themselves. For instance, in his article ‘Carlyle and St. Simon’ (1888), Edward Caird explained how Saint-Simon, ‘one of the first of modern Socialists’, had demanded ‘a new feudalism of industry’, an idea that had subsequently been taken up and popularized in Britain by Carlyle. However, Caird continued, ‘we [must] modify in many ways the broad generalization which Carlyle makes. We [must] treat the advance of individual liberty, as well as the perfecting of organization, as an essential element in progress’. Thus, it was important to remember that ‘there can be no real help given to any one which breaks down, or does not draw forth his individual energy and independence’.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, despite such qualifications, Caird subsequently lauded

¹¹⁴ Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, 35, 42-3, 100-102; Jones, ‘Modern Scientific and Philosophic Thought’, 513-14; Muirhead, *The Use of Philosophy*, 80-81, 86. See also Haldane, *The Pathway to Reality*, 139-41.

¹¹⁵ Caird, ‘Carlyle and St. Simon’, 8-12, 14-15. On this aspect of Caird’s thought, see Colin Tyler, ‘The Liberal Hegelianism of Edward Caird’, *International Journal of Social Economics*, 37 (2010), 852-66,

Carlyle for having inspired ‘a continually increasing effort of Parliament to deal with social questions’, including through factory acts and regulations regarding workplace safety.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in a series of works written during the 1890s, J. S. Mackenzie hailed the passing of the era of ‘laissez faire’, and the recognition that ‘the amassing of material wealth cannot... be accepted as the ultimate... end for human beings’. Now, he continued, the task at hand was ‘what Carlyle used to describe as the “Everlasting Yea” – the work of reorganisation’.¹¹⁷ However, Mackenzie regretted Carlyle’s frequent use of feudal analogies, and his advocacy of economic paternalism and life-long contracts. ‘A paternal relationship’, Mackenzie claimed, ‘easily passes into tyranny’, while the ‘hiring of a man’s services for life – which Carlyle regarded as the ideal method – inevitably means, even under the most favourable conditions, that the person who is hired sinks into little more than a mere means’. Concluding, Mackenzie put forward a compromise position, writing:

the remedy... I think, is not to abolish the cash *nexus*, but to establish higher and better *nexuses* along with it. We must recognize – even Carlyle in his soberer moments recognized – that the *nexus* of absolute masterdom and slavery is no longer possible, and that other small *nexuses* have gone along with it. The *nexuses* of modern times must be of a larger nature, – co-operative societies, religious associations, unions and combinations for mutual help. Such

Colin Tyler, ‘Individuality, Freedom and Socialism: The British Idealists’ Critique of the Fichtean State’, *Political Studies*, 63 (2015), 319-35, and Mander, *British Idealism*, 243-8.

¹¹⁶ Caird, ‘Address After the Queen’s Death’, 143.

¹¹⁷ Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, 76-9. See also the reference to Carlyle on 87-8.

associations... must endeavour to secure that the parties to the contract shall be treated as men, – i.e. as ends in themselves, – and not merely as instruments.¹¹⁸

In 1909 Henry Jones quoted from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, to the effect that only those who laboured were entitled to respect and honour. However, he noted, there were currently many 'stations in life and rounds of daily duty whose spiritual value for those who are engaged in them is very low'. As such, Jones argued, the State ought simply to 'prohibit much of the labour which dehumanizes men'.¹¹⁹ Similarly, in 1911 J. B. Baillie cited Carlyle on the moral and spiritual character of labour, adding that 'to toil is thus to share in and to promote the good of the social whole', that is, the 'common good'. As such, the work of the labourer 'gives him a claim on society, e.g. in his right to have a reward or wage for his labour; it procures him the means of subsistence, compels society to take care of his health and training'. However, Baillie added, while the labourer was thus right 'to compel *others* to recognize the ethical importance of himself and his work for society', he ought also 'to recognize for *himself* the individual responsibilities under which he is placed in performing his task'.¹²⁰ In 1912 William Jethro Brown cited Carlyle on the evils of 'Unemployment', arguing that the sheer extent of the latter now 'impose[d] upon the State new responsibilities which can no

¹¹⁸ Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 184-5; J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Relation Between Ethics and Economics', *International Journal of Ethics*, 3 (1893), 281-308, at 301-5. See also J. S. Mackenzie, 'Spiritual Values', *International Journal of Ethics*, 33 (1923), 248-62, at 260-61, and Mackenzie, *Fundamental Problems*, 268-70.

¹¹⁹ Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, 118-22, reference to Carlyle on 120-22.

¹²⁰ Baillie, 'The Moral and Legal Aspects of Labour', 254-5, 263, 258-9, reference to Carlyle on 258. During the First World War, Baillie worked at the Ministry of Labour, being responsible for industrial conciliation and arbitration. See Sir James Baillie, *Reflections on Life and Religion* (London, 1952), 7-8.

longer be ignored'. In addition to finding work for the unemployed, Brown argued, the State ought also to fix a living wage, as was already being done by the Wages Boards recently established in Australia.¹²¹ In 1918 J. H. Muirhead and Hector Hetherington quoted from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* regarding the dignity and nobility of labour, before adducing a point

of prime ethical significance – that by his industry a man acquires a standing in the world... He has the right to stand four-square before the world, requiring from others, in virtue of his service to them, the things which he does not make for himself... From this point of view there is a genuine ethical significance in a claim of which we used to be constantly reminded – the claim for the Right to Work... It is, in effect, a moral demand; that the individual should have not only the means of life, but the conditions of personal integrity.

In addition to recognising the Right to Work, Muirhead and Hetherington added, the State would also have to address the fact that much actual work was monotonous, stultifying, and even brutalizing, serving to crush rather than to develop intellectual and moral character. Possible solutions, they suggested, might include industrial co-partnership (whereby an employer granted his workers a share in the management and profits of the company), and even the deliberate breaking up of largescale industry, in order to return to a quasi-medieval system of artisanal craftsmanship and guilds. As a

¹²¹ Brown, *Underlying Principles*, 311, 315-18, reference to Carlyle on 311. In 1916 Brown was appointed President of the Industrial Court of South Australia, promoting compulsory arbitration, profit-sharing and co-partnership. See Michael Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890-1960* (St. Lucia, 1984), 40-48.

result, Muirhead and Hetherington hoped, industry would become both an ethical institution and ‘a function of citizenship’. However, they added, this would require ‘a very high degree of industrial patriotism’ on the part of workers themselves.¹²²

Given their strong emphasis on the ethical role of the State and the need to promote the moral and spiritual improvement of the working classes, the British Idealists frequently praised Carlyle for having been one of the earliest advocates of a system of free, universal, public education.¹²³ For instance, in a sermon delivered in 1901 Edward Caird made an explicit point to this effect.¹²⁴ In 1908 J. H. Muirhead argued that Carlyle had thus voiced ‘the democratic claim for equality in the only form in which it represents a claim to justice’, that is, ‘the opportunity not merely to *have* and to be happy, but to *do* and to realise’.¹²⁵ Moreover, on one striking occasion, the British Idealists’ endorsement of Carlyle’s proposals for national education interlocked with their support for his ideas regarding the moral, civic and spiritual potential of labour. In 1917 J. S. Mackenzie told a meeting of the Civic and Moral Educational League that ‘good citizenship’ was ‘the fundamental object that education should seek to promote’. However, in modern Britain, the individual also needed to ‘be prepared for the performance of some specific work’. Thus, Mackenzie continued, training for work

¹²² Hetherington and J. H. Muirhead, *Social Purpose*, 184-91, 194, quotation from Carlyle on 184. See also Muirhead, *Birmingham Institutions*, 237-9, and Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, 143-4.

¹²³ On the British Idealists and education, see generally Mander, *British Idealism*, 517-21.

¹²⁴ Caird, ‘Address After the Queen’s Death’, 143. See also Caird, ‘Carlyle and St. Simon’, 14-15.

¹²⁵ Muirhead, *The Service of the State*, 81-4. See also Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, 143-4.

may rightly be said to be an essential point of moral education, one might almost say even of religious education. Carlyle's favourite dictum, *Laborare est orare*, has at least an element of truth. It is true, however, only when the work is undertaken, as all work ought to be, in the spirit of social service... [The worker] has to interest himself also in the maintenance and advancement of the general life of his community and even of the world. It is the chief business of all of us – and here at least we have Carlyle with us – to try to make our world, or some small spot in it, less chaotic and more human.

In addition to ordinary schools, Mackenzie claimed, such ideals could also be realized through institutions such as the Workers' Educational Association.¹²⁶

As part of their ethical, educational and civilizational ideal of the State, the British Idealists called for a reassertion of the importance of authority. Having accepted Carlyle's criticisms of the cruder forms of democracy (i.e. as simple majority rule), the British Idealists also demonstrated considerable sympathy with his emphasis on heroic leadership. However, they were keen to stress that this ought not to be seen as an alternative to democracy, but rather as a development and completion of democracy from within, and that all authority ought ultimately to rest on the free assent of an educated citizenry. For instance, in 1889 Bernard Bosanquet referred to the role of Pericles in ancient Athens, citing Hegel's judgement that 'of all that is great for humanity, the greatest thing is to dominate the wills of men who *have* wills of their

¹²⁶ J. S. Mackenzie, 'Civic and Moral Education', *International Journal of Ethics*, 27 (1917), 446-63, at 446-7, 456-8.

own'. This, Bosanquet commented, was 'what Carlyle invariably forgot'.¹²⁷ In 1892 Edward Caird made the same point, writing that while 'everyone must admit that Carlyle is right in saying that the success of [democracy], as of every system, must depend greatly on the ability of men to recognise and to reverence those who are their true guides and superiors', 'this need by no means imply anything like an absolute submission, either of opinion or will.'¹²⁸ The same year, Henry Nettleship claimed that Carlyle had rightly sensed where 'the weak side of contemporary liberalism lay', and had 'made a real attempt to set up a positive authority in the shape of the great men of history', even if he had admittedly 'executed his task in too crude and hasty a manner'. Nonetheless, Nettleship argued, Carlyle had undoubtedly been in 'the right path', and the time had come for liberalism to 'take up more positive ground', recognising the importance of great and leading men such as Frederick the Great and Garibaldi, who had actively worked upon and shaped public opinion, showing 'the masses' what they truly willed.¹²⁹ In 1910 Henry Jones called for a reconciliation between Carlylean heroism and democracy, writing:

We shall not, like Plato, prefer the despotism of the philosopher-king to democracy, nor, like Carlyle, endow the ordinary citizen with only the right to obey. We shall recognize that the philosopher-king in order to govern requires

¹²⁷ Bernard Bosanquet, *Essays and Addresses* (London, 1889), 57. The quotation from Hegel is from the latter's *History of Philosophy*. See also Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 286-7.

¹²⁸ Caird, 'The Genius of Carlyle', 265.

¹²⁹ H. Nettleship, 'Authority in the Sphere of Conduct and Intellect', *International Journal of Ethics*, 2 (1892), 217-32, at 219-21, 228-30.

philosophic subjects, and that the citizen who can willingly obey the wise must himself be wise.¹³⁰

For his part, J. S. Mackenzie admitted that if society were ‘constructed on such a model as Carlyle suggested, with the philosopher-king at the top’, there would be a strong risk that the aristocracy of talent would become corrupt. Moreover, Mackenzie claimed, ‘such a society as is here supposed would not in reality be an ideal one, because it would not be for the majority of citizens an educative one’. Thus, the aim ought not to be to ‘make the philosopher a king, but rather to make philosophy king – i.e. to make wisdom the ruling influence in the state – and to bring this about, it would be necessary that *all* the citizens should be trained to think’.¹³¹ However, in his subsequent works, Mackenzie stressed that the ‘aristocracy of talent’ envisaged by ‘Plato, Aristotle, Carlyle and Ruskin’ was not necessarily incompatible with modern representative democracy. He explained:

A real Democracy, in short, must be aristocratic – it must aim at government by the best; and there can be no practical realization of aristocracy except through the cultivation of the Democratic spirit – the spirit that is ready to recognize that to be governed by its best is to be governed by itself.

¹³⁰ Jones, *Working Faith*, 213-14. See also John MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, 151-2 (quoted with approval by Brown, *Underlying Principles*, 153-6, 290-91), MacCunn, *Ethics of Citizenship*, 32-41, 91, 100-113, MacCunn, *Liverpool Addresses*, 39-41, MacCunn, *The Political Philosophy of Burke* (London, 1913), 220, 225-8, 237, John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1912), i, 147, and Muirhead, ‘Carlyle’s Transcendental Symbolism’, 144.

¹³¹ Mackenzie, *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, 287-90, see also 337-8. See also J. S. Mackenzie, *Lectures on Humanism* (London, 1907), 177, and Mackenzie, *Elements*, 339-40.

Such a polity, Mackenzie concluded, would represent the realisation of that ‘well-ordered state, at once truly democratic and truly aristocratic, of which Plato and Carlyle could only vaguely dream’.¹³² More concretely, in 1911 Mackenzie proposed replacing the House of Lords with a ‘national Senate’, ‘an assembly of men (and, I should hope, of women too), of trained capacity and long service in the affairs of state’, designed to ‘advise and guide’ the deliberations of the House of Commons. This would, Mackenzie claimed

bring us nearer to what Plato meant by his conception of the philosopher-king, and to what Carlyle meant by the rule of Heroes. I doubt whether we ought to be ruled either by a philosopher or by a hero; but it would probably be well for us if we could be guided by the one and led by the other.¹³³

Thus, as Mackenzie reiterated in 1926, the ‘Divine Right of the Hero’ ought ‘to give place to the more modest claim of the born leader to be allowed to lead’. After all, as ‘Carlyle himself recognized’, ‘the typical Hero is one who has absorbed the best wisdom of his time and understands what, at least in one sense, may be called the Real Will of his people’.¹³⁴

¹³² Mackenzie, ‘The Dangers of Democracy’, 131-2, 139-40, 144-5. See also the references to Carlyle on 136-8, 141-2.

¹³³ Mackenzie, ‘Some Thoughts on Democracy’, 238-9. See also J. S. Mackenzie, *Outlines of Social Philosophy* (London, 1918), 171-2, and J. S. Mackenzie, *Arrows of Desire: Essay on Our National Character and Outlook* (London, 1920), 170-71.

¹³⁴ John S. Mackenzie, ‘The Present Outlook in Social Philosophy,’ *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 1 (January 1926), 55-68, at 62. See also Mackenzie, ‘Conflicts in Valuations’, 171-5, Mackenzie,

Finally, Carlyle also had an impact on at least one British Idealist's vision of the British Empire.¹³⁵ In 1900 J. H. Muirhead wrote of how during the early-nineteenth century, the Benthamites and the various adherents of 'Manchesterism' had seen colonies as mere commercial assets, to be discarded when no longer remunerative. However, Muirhead wrote, by the mid-1840s, a new 'Spirit of the Century' had begun to take shape. 'If', he continued, 'there is any single name more than another that represents the ideas for which our new imperialism stands, it is Carlyle's'. In particular, Muirhead explained, Carlyle had shown that the value of the colonies was not to be estimated in purely commercial terms. To the contrary, they were an extension of Britain itself, the dwelling place of the 'children of Britain', and destined to themselves become 'the cradle of mighty Nations, and their Sciences and Heroisms'. So far as indigenous peoples were concerned, Muirhead argued, the British State was charged with a grand civilizational and ethical enterprise, namely 'the reconstruction of the moral, industrial and political ideas of some four or five hundred millions of souls'. Indeed, there was no reason to hesitate regarding 'the spread of European ideas of truth and justice', Muirhead argued, since 'Justice is justice', 'all the world over'. However, he added, it would be preferable to set about this task in a 'spirit of Conciliation', seeking to secure 'the acquiescence, if not the co-operation, of other nations'.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Fundamental Problems, 108, 151-2, and Bradley, *Miscellany*, 237-8.

¹³⁵ On the British Idealists' high-minded imperialism, see generally Mander, *British Idealism*, 521-5.

¹³⁶ J. H. Muirhead, 'What Imperialism Means' [1900], in idem., *Philosophy and Life and Other Essays* (London, 1902), 79-97, at 82-7, 89-94.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the British Idealists had established themselves as the predominant school of British philosophy. In turn, they looked back upon Carlyle as the predominant British thinker of the nineteenth century, considering themselves his heirs in almost every sense imaginable. Via Carlyle, the opposition of earlier Scottish thinkers such as Reid and Hamilton to the scepticism, materialism and sensationalism of Hume was thus transmitted well into the twentieth century. As this article has demonstrated, the British Idealists frequently interpreted Carlyle's significance in terms of a series of transitions. With regard to theology, the British Idealists praised Carlyle for having resolved the eighteenth-century dualism of Deism and materialism within his own doctrine of 'Natural Supernaturalism', that is, the belief that the divine was *immanent* in nature, matter and history. This, they argued, provided a means to reconcile the advances of modern science, and particularly Darwinism, with a renewed faith in divine providence. With regard to morals and ethics, the British Idealists attached particular value to Carlyle's polemic against the Epicureanism of the eighteenth century, including both the sceptical Epicureanism of Hume and Bentham and the Christian Epicureanism of Paley. In opposition to these thinkers, the British Idealists pointed out, Carlyle had vindicated the natural sociability of man, preaching the divine force immanent within humanity, requiring to be realized through 'Duty'. In this sense, the British Idealists believed, Carlyle had borne a strong resemblance to the ancient Stoics. Finally, with regard to politics, the British Idealists eulogised Carlyle for having refuted the eighteenth-century, Epicurean claim that the state was but a means to the pursuit of self-interest and material wealth. To the contrary, they made clear, Carlyle had successfully re-asserted the educational, ethical and indeed spiritual significance of the State, as an agency of the divine principle of Justice that animated the universe. In

this regard, the British Idealists claimed, Carlyle had resembled both Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, it is arguable that Carlyle's true political legacy ought to be understood in these terms, before his reputation was swallowed up by accusations of 'fascism' beginning in the 1930s. Furthermore, the British Idealists also praised Carlyle for having discredited the utilitarian anti-imperialism of Bentham, and for having vindicated the progressive, civilizational role of the British Empire. In this sense, the British Idealists followed Carlyle in believing that the ethical mission of the British State was not confined only to Britain, but rather extended to the furthest frontiers of the earth.